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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA  
SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS AND PARADOX

by



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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled Shakespeare's Sonnets and Paradox, submitted by Sydney Grace Smith in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



## ABSTRACT

In this thesis I have attempted to distinguish between the rhetorical formal paradox and the creative paradox - between paradox as irresolvable contradiction, and paradox as a measure of strangeness and wonder. I have not attempted to deal with every one of Shakespeare's sonnets, nor to follow any chronological sequence in my treatment of the Sonnets. By exploring recurrent thematic threads I have attempted to discover what the Sonnets tell us about the role played by paradox in the creative experience.



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We all know that art is not true.  
Art is a lie that makes us realize truth.

. . .Picasso





## CHAPTER I

### PARADOX AND METAPHOR

- (1) ROSALIE COLIE'S PARADOXIA EPIDEMICA IS THE FIRST COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF THE FLOURISHING OF PARADOX DURING THE RENAISSANCE, AND HER BOOK IS A USEFUL STEPPING STONE INTO A DISCUSSION OF THE NATURE OF PARADOX AND THE ROLE IT PLAYS IN CREATIVE THOUGHT.

Professor Colie sees paradox as the informing principle behind the works of Shakespeare, Donne, Spenser, Montaigne, Bacon, and Milton, to name only a few; and she calls the preoccupation with the paradoxical during the Renaissance an epidemic.

During the epidemic, paradox was recreative in the highest sense of that term, ever attempting the imitative recovery of a transcendent "truth" with all its ambivalences. Because paradox manages to be at once figure of speech and figure of thought, appropriate to a view of the universe profoundly metaphysical - and, more often than not, profoundly religious - it served to mediate all sorts of ideas and things which, under strict categorical arrangements, do not at first glance appear to "fit."<sup>1</sup>

Paradox, for Professor Colie, is a means of accommodating opposites, contradictions, and ambiguities which logically do not "fit." It is a means of resolving the irresolvable, and peculiarly suited to a pluralistic world view.

Logically, she writes, the paradox results in a cancellation like the Cretan who claimed that all Cretans are liars.



But for the paradox to work, the contradictions must retain their ambiguity. The Cretan is not either a liar, or a teller of truth; he is neither and both. Paradox, she says, always does two things at the same time. It cancels itself out, yet it derives its power from the simultaneous existence of opposites. And it is not only self-contradictory, but self-critical.

The rhetorical paradox criticizes the limitations and rigidity of argumentation; the logical paradox criticizes the limitations and rigidity of logic; the epistemological paradox calls into question the process of human thought, as well as the categories thought out (by human thought) to express human thought.<sup>2</sup>

The Greek word paradoxos, however, meant a statement which is surprising, but not necessarily a contradiction. According to William Austin:

Discussions of "paradox" tend to suffer from the fact that the meaning of the term has undergone a major shift in the course of its development. We ordinarily think now of a paradox as a statement which on the face of it, seems self-contradictory. But there is an older sense, corresponding to the Greek paradoxos, in which a "paradox" is a statement which is surprising, contrary to general expectation or belief, but not necessarily having even the appearance of self-contradiction.<sup>3</sup>

The fundamental characteristic of paradox is simply wonder.

Rosalie Colie writes:

Always "about" being, the paradox is not fully ontological, since by drawing attention to its own form and technique it demands a "wondrer," a reader to admire it and to wonder about it.<sup>4</sup>

But the poet who employs paradox is himself a "wondrer," and his wonder is generated more by the "way it is," than



by logical contradiction.

Shakespeare's Sonnet 138 beginning:

When my love swears that she is made of truth,  
I do believe her, though I know she lies. . .

conveys more than logical contradiction. It is the poetic equivalent of a surprising and necessarily contradictory situation - a paradoxical situation which can only be expressed through the language of paradox.

(2) PARADOX IS AN ATTEMPT TO GO BEYOND LANGUAGE THROUGH THE USE OF LANGUAGE.

Cleanth Brooks in The Well Wrought Urn states that paradox is "the language appropriate and inevitable to poetry"<sup>5</sup> - inevitable because language, the poet's instrument of exploration, is ambiguous. There is always a fundamental discrepancy between language and thought, and between language and experience. It is the business of the poet to explore the paradoxical nature of language as a means of approximating truth, or reality.

Throughout Shakespeare's Sonnets ambiguities and contradictions at the heart of love are matched by ambiguities in language.

Only my plague thus far I count my gain,  
That she that makes me sin awards me pain. (141)

If thy unworthiness raised love in me,  
More worthy I to be beloved of thee. (150)





better it were,  
 Though not to love, yet, love, to tell me so. (140)

D. A. Traversi sees the Sonnets as an essential step in Shakespeare's development as an artist primarily because the form of the sonnet led him to the condensed and immediate language of the later plays, and also because the Sonnets are an exploration of the ambiguity, not only of language, but of experience itself.

Shakespeare's use of ambiguity in the sonnets is directly related to the nature of the experience he wished to convey. The final ambiguity lies in experience itself, in the simultaneous fulfilment and destruction of the values of human life by time. . . . This situation will be carried on, absorbed into vaster constructions covering a far wider range of experiences, in Shakespeare's mature work. The great tragedies form a single, continuous process occupied in the exploration and extension of it; and each stage of this exploration, this extension, involves a further organization of verse and language.<sup>6</sup>

"If the final ambiguity lies in the experience itself," the final paradox lies in experience itself. Ambiguity is simply one facet of Shakespeare's total vision of life as process, as a changing, growing and decaying thing, of which the verbal equivalent is paradox.

(3) "PERHAPS EVERY SCIENCE MUST START WITH METAPHOR AND  
 END WITH ALGEBRA: AND PERHAPS WITHOUT THE METAPHOR  
 THERE WOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN ANY ALGEBRA."<sup>7</sup>

In Models and Metaphors Max Black compares the scientist's use of models - scale, analogue, and mathematic- with the use of metaphor. The scientist, he says, works



"not by analogy, but through and by means of an underlying analogy."<sup>8</sup>

The difference is between thinking of the electrical field as if it were filled with a material medium, and thinking of it as being such a medium.<sup>9</sup>

The metaphoric as being model, Black maintains, is heuristic and reveals new relationships in the same way that metaphor reveals new relationships; and both, he says, are attempts to "pour new content into old bottles."<sup>10</sup>

A memorable metaphor has the power to bring two separate domains into cognitive and emotional relation by using language directly appropriate to the one as a lens for seeing the other; the implications, suggestions, and supporting values entwined with the literal use of the metaphorical expression enable us to see a new subject matter in a new way. The extended meanings that result, the relations between initially disparate realms created, can neither be antecedently predicted nor subsequently paraphrased in prose. . . . Much the same can be said about the role of models in scientific research. . . . They too, bring about a wedding of disparate subjects, by a distinctive operation of transfer of the implications of relatively well-organized cognitive fields.<sup>11</sup>

Definitions, or generalizations, about creativity ultimately are as self-defeating as definitions of paradox, but Arthur Koestler in the Act of Creation points to at least one of the major characteristics of creative activity. Creativity, he says, always operates on more than one plane of awareness, and is the result of the tension created by the intersection or "bisociation" of two planes or two matrixes of thought.<sup>12</sup> It is the juxtaposition of disparate elements which reinforce, rather than negate one another,



and reveals what Susan Sontag, in another context, calls "the logic of coherence behind contradiction."<sup>13</sup>

In Some Versions of Pastoral William Empson makes similar comments on the function of the double plot in Renaissance literature. His basic assumption is that the comic or sub-plot acts as a "lens" for seeing the main plot, and that the two are joined together through a series of "subdued puns."<sup>14</sup> To translate Empson's argument into the language of Koestler, the sub-plot and the main plot are "bisociated" through the use of the language of one matrix in a new matrix or situation. Thus the pun on "general" in Troilus and Cressida, or the pun on "nothing" in King Lear acts as a focus for both plays. The "general" and the mob, and the personal and public situations are metaphorically linked in Troilus and Cressida; and King Lear finally does make "something" out of the "poor bare, forked, animal"<sup>15</sup> who is nothing without the clothing of responsibility.

The similarities between Black, Empson, and also Koestler are indicative not only of the metaphoric nature of creative thought in all fields, but also of the metaphoric nature of paradox.

In paradox, as in all metaphor, something is declared to be what it manifestly is not - "my love" (either the feeling or the girl) is not a red, red rose; an Alexandrine line is not a snake, after all.<sup>16</sup>

Structurally paradox is seeing one thing in terms of another.



Paradox is double plot. Like metaphor it is not the resolution of seeming contradiction, but the tension created by "pouring new content into old bottles," or conversely, pouring old content into new bottles.

The central problem and paradox in dealing with Shakespeare's Sonnets is, of course, that of address. Critics are faced with the desire to identify not only "thou," but "you," and also "I." But if there is any validity in the preceding observations on metaphor, we will be forced to look at the narrative content in the Sonnets as an analogue model for "something else."

(4) IN A SENSE ALL WORKS OF ART ARE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL, BUT SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS EXPRESS NO DIRECT INFORMATION ABOUT SHAKESPEARE'S "LIFE." ALL IS METAPHOR. THEY DO, ON THE OTHER HAND, REVEAL A GREAT DEAL ABOUT THE ART OF ENGLAND'S GREATEST DRAMATIST.

Criticism tends to deal with Shakespeare's Sonnets almost exclusively as poetic autobiography. "Scorn not the sonnet," Wordsworth warns the critic, for "with this key / Shakespeare unlocked his heart,"<sup>17</sup> and generations of critics have gone to the Sonnets searching for the "key" to Shakespeare's involvement with a fair young man of high estate, and a dark woman of dubious status and morals, who has been miscalled "the dark lady." In Sonnet 76 Shakespeare seems almost to anticipate the centuries of debate as to the





identity of his beloved.

Why is my verse so barren of new pride,  
 So far from variation or quick change?  
 Why with the time do I not glance aside  
 To new-found methods and to compounds strange?  
 Why write I still all one, ever the same,  
 And keep invention in a noted weed,  
 That every word doth almost tell my name,  
 Showing their birth and where they did proceed? (76)

The belief that the Sonnets are autobiographical is reflected in the concern of still other critics with the sequence of the sonnets. While some, such as Brents Stirling, do attempt to base their arguments for regrouping on poetics,<sup>18</sup> the effort of most has been directed toward reducing the Sonnets to a tidy narrative, to make them "tell my story"<sup>19</sup> as Hamlet would have Horatio do.

Terms like the "biographical fallacy" or the "intentional fallacy" are, of course, convenient pigeon holes for the critic of the critic. As W.K. Wimsatt points out, "there is hardly a problem of literary criticism in which the critic's approach will not be qualified by his view of 'intention.'"<sup>20</sup> Criticism must come to terms with the tension between artistic form and intention.

But when we attempt to identify, and therefore to limit, the "thou" or the "you" of Shakespeare's Sonnets, we ignore the ambiguous nature of metaphor which can only state, "this then is thou, neither is this Thou." We may also miss what Rosalie Colie calls the paradoxical nature



of self-reference.

The self-conscious introduction, or the self-critical examination by an author of his own mind or his own work, or the arch introduction of an author into his own work of art is paradoxical in its infinitely regressive reference. It is also paradoxical in that it introduces at once a second level of "reality" into the imaginative invention, conventional fictive reality together with the representation of actual, fleshly, sensible reality.<sup>21</sup>

For example, in the Canterbury Tales Chaucer, the poet, introduces Chaucer, the pilgrim. A fat, naive, middle-aged pilgrim apologizes constantly for his lack of skill at "reporting" the tales of the other pilgrims - narratives which were written by the poet himself. The "I" of Shakespeare's Sonnets does not have the concreteness of Chaucer's persona, but the identity of Shakespeare's "I" is at least as paradoxical.

The seeming narrative development of Shakespeare's Sonnets is only a part of the over-all paradox of the Sonnets. They are, if nothing else, a rebellion against the strictures of clock time, against story-line, against narrative linearity. Time and thought in the Sonnets are non-linear, and non-chronological. They have no beginning and no end, and operate in a magnetic field of tensions and attractions which the poet necessarily reports in an arbitrary fashion.



(5) ART IS NOT SIMPLY AN IMITATION OR SELECTED DUPLICATION OF REALITY BUT A TRANSLATION OF OBSERVED CHARACTERISTICS INTO THE FORMS OF A GIVEN MEDIUM.<sup>22</sup>

The play King Lear takes place on the stage, and for Shakespeare the stage is a little world. At the end of the play Lear says:

When we are born, we cry that we are come  
To this great stage of fools.<sup>23</sup>

The little "stage of fools" is a microcosm for the bigger "stage of fools," our own world. But the "world" on the stage is not like our world in every detail. The characters are divided into two camps - the good and the bad. King Lear moves from the sophisticated world of the courts to the rough inhuman world of the heath. There is no in-between. Shakespeare transforms the familiar elements of our world into a new world which is a metaphor for our own world. But the world on the stage has its own existence and its own laws.

The Chorus in Henry V asks:

Can this cockpit hold  
The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram  
Within this wooden O the very casques  
That did affright the air at Agincourt?<sup>24</sup>

Stage space only resembles our space; stage time only resembles our time. This is the paradox of the theatre.

The characters on the stage, too, are paradoxical. Cleopatra is a queen who must be reduced to a woman before





she can truly become a queen. Antony can be cured not by a physician, but by a wound. Othello exemplifies the paradox that the corruption of the best leads to the worst, that "lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds."<sup>25</sup> And Iago is paradox personified. He lies and he does not lie, "I am not what I am."<sup>26</sup>

Possibly because art is an abstraction from the process of nature, Shakespeare uses paradox as a main structural device in all of the metaphysical tragedies. Much has been made of the relationship between the Sonnets and the plays, but the emphasis has been on content rather than form. The form which paradox imposes on the chaos of the "real world" has been ignored. The exploration of paradox which Shakespeare conducted in the Sonnets is vital for an understanding of his aesthetic of drama.



## CHAPTER II

### THE PARADOX OF PROCESS

- (1) ONE OF SHAKESPEARE'S MAIN CONCERNS IN THE SONNETS IS A DEFINITION OF THE "ROLE OF THE POET." IN THE FIRST NINETEEN SONNETS HE NOTES THAT POETRY CAN PROVIDE ONLY A QUALIFIED "ETERNIZING" OF BEAUTY.

From fairest creatures we desire increase,  
That thereby beauty's rose might never die,  
But as the ripper should by time decease,  
His tender heir might bear his memory:  
But thou, contracted to thine own bright eyes,  
Feed'st thy light's flame with self-substantial fuel,  
Making a famine where abundance lies,  
Thy self thy foe, to thy sweet self too cruel.  
Thou that art now the world's fresh ornament  
And only herald to the gaudy spring,  
Within thine own bud buriest thy content  
And, tender churl, mak'st waste in niggarding.  
Pity the world, or else this glutton be,  
To eat the world's due, by the grave and thee. (1)

Sonnet 1 is not the beginning nor the end of the sonnet sequence, but it introduces a ground bass which the poet elaborates and finally rejects. Ostensibly this sonnet marks the beginning of a series of poems in which the poet attempts to persuade a young man to marry; but, as numerous critics have pointed out, there is no bride in the picture. There are also no children - the young man is urged to perpetuate his beauty and to duplicate his "form,"<sup>1</sup> or his "image,"<sup>2</sup> or his "copy."<sup>3</sup> As early as Sonnet 10 he is urged to create "another self" for love of the poet, and by



Sonnet 22, the poet has concluded:

For all that beauty that doth cover thee  
Is but the seemly raiment of my heart. . . . (22)

Throughout the first nineteen sonnets the poet sees himself as a mimetic artist, and his art as a catalyst in the organic process. The sequence provides a tentative and ironic answer to Hopkins's question:

How to keep - is there any any, is there none such,  
nowhere known some, bow or brooch or braid or brace,  
lace, latch, or catch or key to keep  
Back beauty, keep it, beauty, beauty, beauty, . . . from  
vanishing away.<sup>4</sup>

And the answer is paradoxical - the only way the process of Time can be defeated is by becoming part of the process, part of the cycle of reproduction, birth, survival, death and rebirth.

The "friend" of Sonnet 1 is enclosed in the narcissistic mirror of self love, and as Marshall McLuhan points out, it is not himself he loves, but the extension of himself.

The Greek myth of Narcissus is directly concerned with a fact of human experience, as the word Narcissus indicates. It is from the Greek word narcosis, or numbness. The youth Narcissus mistook his own reflection in the water for another person. This extension of himself by mirror numbed his perceptions until he became the servomechanism of his own extended or repeated image. The nymph Echo tried to win his love with fragments of his own speech, but in vain. He was numb. He had adapted to his extension of himself and had become a closed system.<sup>5</sup>

Shakespeare's narcissistic "friend" of Sonnet 1 is "contracted to thine own bright eyes," and the word contracted has here not only the force of a marriage contract, but



also of contracting and diminishing. By "having traffic with thyself alone,"<sup>6</sup> he creates a famine in the world. Paradoxically, he wastes himself by preserving and limiting himself. And "waste," like "contract," combines noun and verb. Not only does he waste or misuse himself, but he literally creates waste.

He is advised to husband himself - to breed, increase, and propagate. But the advice does not constitute an invitation to pleasure. Rather, it is an argument of the healthy sexuality of Claudio and Juliet in Measure for Measure.

Your brother and his lover have embraced.  
 As those that feed grow full, as blossoming time  
 That from the seedness the bare fallow brings  
 To teeming foison, even so her plenteous womb  
 Expresseth his full tilth and husbandry.<sup>7</sup>

In Sonnet 12, as Murray Kreiger notes, the poet equates the processes of human life with the processes of nature.

When I do count the clock that tells the time,  
 And see the brave day sunk in hideous night;  
 When I behold the violet past prime,  
 And sable curls all silvered o'er with white;  
 When lofty trees I see barren of leaves,  
 Which erst from heat did canopy the herd,  
 And summer's green all girded up in sheaves,  
 Borne on the bier with white and bristly beard;  
 Then of thy beauty do I question make,  
 That thou among the wastes of time must go,  
 Since sweets and beauties do themselves forsake  
 And die as fast as they see others grow;  
     And nothing 'gainst Time's scythe can make defence  
     Save breed, to brave him when he takes thee hence. (12)

In Sonnet 12, Krieger writes, we move from analogy to relation to identity between the natural and the human. We move, that





is, from the analogy of faded violets and faded hair, to the relation between the trees which protect the herd, and nature which protects the "human herd," to identification of the funeral for summer's green and man's "bristly beard" which are both subject to "Time's scythe." And the only way man can defeat Time is by becoming one with nature, to increase as plants increase, thus transforming his life from linearity to cycle.<sup>8</sup>

The traditional ploy that art can eternize beauty is weak within the context of the sequence which postulates the total subservience of all things to "Time's scythe." Sonnet 16 emphasizes the fact that the lines of the poet's verse are dependent upon the lines of life.

But wherefore do not you a mightier way  
 Make war upon this bloody tyrant, Time?  
 And fortify yourself in your decay  
 With means more blessed than my barren rhyme?  
 Now stand you on the top of happy hours,  
 And many maiden gardens, yet unset,  
 With virtuous wish would bear your living flowers  
 Much liker than your painted counterfeit.  
 So should the lines of life that life repair,  
 Which this, Time's pencil, or my pupil pen,  
 Neither in inward worth nor outward fair,  
 Can make you live yourself in eyes of men.  
     To give yourself away keeps yourself still;  
     And you must live, drawn by your own sweet skill. (16)

Poetry in these first sonnets is only the force which protects and preserves the processes of life. It has no life of its own, the "painted counterfeit" of the poet-painter is barren and fruitless. Yet, paradoxically the plea for entering into the natural process occurs within a



poem which is itself outside of the natural process.

Creativity is an essentially anti-natural activity and if art protects or preserves it does so, not through imitation, but through transformation, through its form or mask.

(2) SHAKESPEARE'S DEFIANCE OF THE PROCESSES OF TIME IN THE SONNETS ULTIMATELY IS PARADOXICAL.

According to I. Panofsky, Time in ancient art is represented either as "Aion" - the divine principle of creativeness, or as "Kairos" - the fleeting moment which marks the turning point in a man's life. This latter figure merged with the figure of "Fortune" in the Middle Ages, and during the Renaissance Time acquired the scythe and sickle - symbols of destructivity.<sup>9</sup> In the Sonnets Shakespeare explores the paradoxical interdependence of creativity and destructivity.

Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,  
So do our minutes hasten to their end;  
Each changing place with that which goes before,  
In sequent toil all forwards do contend.  
Nativity, once in the main of light,  
Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crowned,  
Crooked eclipses 'gainst his glory fight,  
And Time that gave doth now his gift confound. (60)

That time of year thou mayst in me behold  
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang  
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,  
Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.  
In me thou see'st the twilight of such day  
As after sunset fadeth in the west,  
Which by and by black night doth take away,  
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.  
In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire  
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,



As the death-bed whereon it must expire,  
Consumed with that which it was nourished by. (73)

Hiram Haydn sees one of the major characteristics of Counter-Renaissance thought as a reaction against the preoccupation of the mediaeval scholastics and the Renaissance Christian-Humanists with law, order, degree, and especially with limit. Counter-Renaissance romanticists treat man's nature as unlimited, his desire as insatiable. Professor Haydn writes:

There is in fact no stronger single impression that one carries away from an imaginatively sympathetic reading of the Elizabethans than this conviction of their immoderate and unregenerate love of the transitory world of sensuous beauty.<sup>10</sup>

And:

. . .with many of the Elizabethans it seems as though they felt a defiant need to deny the very truth that so often over-shadowed their delight in the world of physical experience - the knowledge that it must end, that the blossoms had to die and the shadows slip away.<sup>11</sup>

For Shakespeare, limit - the knowledge that the "blossoms had to die" is an absolute pre-supposition.

According to J.B. Leishman:

For him [Shakespeare] there is no recognisable distinction . . . between the Time that destroys the mightiest monuments of stone or bronze and the Time that transfixes the flourish set on Youth; for him the devouringness of Time, the swift-footedness of Time, the brevity of human life and the transience of youth and beauty are continually and inseparably associated, and what he gives us is an ever-changing series of variations upon, personifications, metaphorisations and (one might almost say) dramatisations of, the single theme of transience.<sup>12</sup>

The "friend" of the first nineteen sonnets must traverse the





"wastes of time"<sup>13</sup> for the lines of the poet's verse cannot arrest "this bloody tyrant, Time."<sup>14</sup> And in the master-mistress sonnets, the poet himself is "beated and chopped with antiquity."<sup>15</sup> "Lovers houres" may be "full eternity"<sup>16</sup> for the Petrarchan lover, but Shakespeare does not guarantee his love eternity in time.

Thy glass will show thee how thy beauties wear,  
 Thy dial how thy precious minutes waste:  
 The vacant leaves thy mind's imprint will bear,  
 And of this book this learning mayst thou taste.  
 The wrinkles which thy glass will truly show  
 Of mouthéd graves will give thee memory:  
 Thou by thy dial's shady stealth mayst know  
 Time's thievish progress to eternity. (77)

Numerous sonnets, however, do claim that poetry can preserve beauty and conquer Time.

Yet, do thy worst, old Time! Despite thy wrong,  
 My love shall in my verse ever live young. (19)

Not marble, nor the gilded monument  
 Of princes, shall outlive this pow'rful rhyme;  
 But you shall shine more bright in these contents  
 Than unswept stone, besmeared with sluttish time. (55)

His beauty shall in these black lines be seen,  
 And they shall live, and he in them still green. (63)

Where, alack,  
 Shall Time's best jewel from Time's chest lie hid?  
 Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back?  
 Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?  
 O, none, unless this miracle have might,  
 That in black ink my love may still shine bright. (65)

Rise, resty Muse, my love's sweet face survey,  
 If Time have any wrinkle graven there;  
 If any, be a satire to decay,  
 And make Time's spoils despised everywhere.  
 Give my love fame faster than Time wastes life:  
 So thou prevent'st his scythe and crooked knife. (100)



But the claim that poetry can stop "Time's spoils" is a platitude that Shakespeare himself was aware of. And what the poetry immortalizes is the poet's own process, but it is process arrested through art.

Continually throughout the Sonnets Shakespeare stresses an anti-mimetic and anti-representational position with respect to the function of the poet. The argument of Sonnet 83 is that the poet who imitates beauty only impairs and falsifies it.

I never saw that you did painting need,  
And therefore to your fair no painting set;  
I found, or thought I found, you did exceed  
The barren tender of a poet's debt:  
And therefore have I slept in your report,  
That you yourself, being extant, well might show  
How far a modern quill doth come too short,  
Speaking of worth; what worth in you doth grow.  
This silence for my sin you did impute,  
Which shall be most my glory, being dumb;  
For I impair not beauty being mute,  
When others would give life and bring a tomb. (83)

The "rival poet" is a mimetic artist and his imitation is seen as a form of thievery which steals from and deadens life.

Yet what of thee thy poet doth invent  
He robs thee of, and pays it thee again. (79)

Why should false painting imitate his cheek,  
And steal dead seeing of his living hue? (67)

Blackmur argues that the "shadowy presence of the rival poet suggests that he never existed save as an aid to Shakespeare's poetics."<sup>17</sup> And Shakespeare's "poetics" or aesthetic places a great deal of onus on the reader or



audience. The chorus of Henry V bids the audience to "eke out our performance with your mind."<sup>18</sup> Shakespeare knew that theatre and poetry require the audience or reader to participate imaginatively, and throughout the Sonnets he places a great deal of onus on seeing.

So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,  
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee. (18)

So, till the judgement that yourself arise,  
You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes. (55)

In Sonnet 81 the tomb poem becomes a womb in the eyes of the beholder.

Or I shall live your epitaph to make,  
Or you survive when I in earth am rotten:  
From hence your memory death cannot take,  
Although in me each part will be forgotten.  
Your name from hence immortal life shall have,  
Though I, once gone, to all the world must die:  
The earth can yield me but a common grave  
When you entombed in men's eyes shall lie.  
Your monument shall be my gentle verse  
Which eyes not yet created shall o'er-read;  
And tongues to be your being shall rehearse  
When all the breathers of this world are dead.  
You still shall live--such virtue hath my pen--  
Where breath most breathes, even in the mouths of men. (81)

The words of the poet ultimately are dead. They trap life, like the figures on Keats's Grecian Urn, in a lifeless death. If there is any life at all in a work of art, the reader or audience puts it there, and in Shakespeare's aesthetic the creative process completes itself in the perception of the reader. This is the paradox of Shakespeare's defiance of Time through the immortalizing power of poetry.



While the Sonnets complain against the destructive nature of Time, there is always a recognition of its creative power - a recognition that poetry, like love or passion, is a growth, and requires Time in order to realize its full potential.

- (3) SHAKESPEARE WAS AWARE NOT ONLY OF THE PARADOXICAL - CREATIVE DESTRUCTIVE - NATURE OF TIME, BUT ALSO OF THE PARADOXICAL NATURE OF FUTURE TIME.

Whenever time is laid down in space it is rationalized but the future is always unknown. The narrative deals with rational time, with the past and the present; drama, on the other hand, deals with the future, with becoming rather than being. It is this futuring quality of the imagination which links love and art in the Sonnets. Just as Shakespeare's aesthetic of poetry admits process and time, so does his aesthetic of love.

Numerous sonnets claim that love can be immutable in a world of change. Love is the "ever-fixed mark,"<sup>19</sup> the still point in a world of flux.

Kind is my love to-day, to-morrow kind,  
Still constant in a wondrous excellence;  
Therefore my verse to constancy confined,  
One thing expressing, leaves out difference. (105)

Let those who are in favour with their stars  
Of public honour and proud titles boast,  
Whilst I, whom fortune of such triumph bars,  
Unlooked for joy in that I honour most.  
Great princes' favourites their fair leaves spread  
But as the marigold at the sun's eye,







And in themselves their pride lies buried,  
 For at a frown they in their glory die.  
 The painful warrior famouséd for fight,  
 After a thousand victories once foiled,  
 Is from the book of honour razéd quite,  
 And all the rest forgot for which he toiled:  
     Then happy I, that love and am beloved  
     Where I may not remove nor be removed. (25)

In the group of sonnets 20 - 31 love is not only the compensation for worldly failure, as it is in Sonnet 25, but it is the embodiment of all past loves. But the attempt to create a static, unchanging situation, "where I may not remove nor be removed,"<sup>20</sup> is paradoxical within the context of the whole sequence in which love is always subject to separation, betrayal and jealousy.

If love reveals unlimited potential, it also paradoxically reveals potential limitation; if it induces the concept of perfection and stasis, it necessarily and paradoxically induces awareness of imperfection and impending chaos. Numerous sonnets are concerned with the psychology of anticipation. The poet anticipates the betrayal and loss of love in the future - a future which is inherent in the present.

Against that time, if ever that time come,  
 When I shall see thee frown on my defects,  
 When as thy love hath cast his utmost sum,  
 Called to that audit by advised respects;  
 Against that time when thou shalt strangely pass  
 And scarcely greet me with that sun, thine eye,  
 When love, converted from the thing it was,  
 Shall reasons find of settled gravity;  
 Against that time do I ensconce me here  
 Within the knowledge of mine own desart,  
 And this my hand against myself uprear,  
 To guard the lawful reasons on thy part.  
     To leave poor me thou hast the strength of laws,  
     Since why to love I can allege no cause. (49)



In Sonnet 90 the anticipation turns to bitter accusation:

Then hate me when thou wilt: if ever, now;  
Now, while the world is bent my deeds to cross,  
Join with the spite of fortune, make me bow,  
And do not drop in for an after-loss. (90)

And in Sonnet 64 to sentimentality:

Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminare,  
That Time will come and take my love away.  
This thought is as a death, which cannot choose  
But weep to have that which it fears to lose. (64)

Significantly, in Sonnet 64, it is "thought" which "weeps to have that which it fears to lose," not "I." It is thought as process which subjects constancy and immutability to the laws of process, and this futuring anticipatory quality is what makes the Sonnets dramatic rather than narrative.



## CHAPTER III

### THE PARADOX OF MACHIAVELLIANISM

- (1) SHAKESPEARE'S PREOCCUPATION WITH THE PARADOXES OF ART, TIME, AND PROCESS TELESCOPE, IN THE SONNETS, IN HIS TREATMENT OF THE PARADOXES OF MACHIAVELLIANISM.

Politically, Machiavelli "defined" - he did not invent - the Counter-Renaissance emphasis on empiricism, pragmatism, individualism and subjectivity.

The theocratic, collectivist ideals of the Middle Ages were being replaced by a conception of life based on the pre-Christian polity and the individuum. The new conception emphasized the plastic force of the individual at the expense of the surrounding atmosphere; the new hero stood out arrayed in the full glory of his strength, almost too intense to be real. The discovery of the individuum was parallel to the discovery of the nude: the draughtsmen were so engrossed in the discovery of the anatomy of their models that they drew the human body not as it appears to the eye but as it is known to be constituted to the scientific mind of the anatomist. Machiavelli's hero is the counterpart of the nudes painted by Signorelli or sketched by Leonardo: he is a scientific being, breathing in an element subtler than the sublunar air, no less metaphysical than the mediaeval man, but by an inverse process of exaggeration. The mediaeval man was too much of a man in the mass; the Renaissance man, on the other hand, was isolated as a self-sufficient unit. . . .<sup>1</sup>

According to Mario Praz the legend of Machiavelli as wicked politician was derived from France - specifically from the Contre Machiavel of Gentillet, which was translated into English in 1577. Although Machiavelli was known in England before this time, Gentillet's work crystallized popular feeling. The Elizabethans saw the code of the Prince



as one of conscious duplicity in which the only imperatives were self-preservation and the Will to Power; the only criteria of success were the concrete and the tangible.

Machiavelli advises the Prince to "have a mind capable of turning in whatever direction the winds of Fortune and the variations of state require."

the prince who has best known how to act as a fox has come out best. But one who has this capacity must understand how to keep it covered, and be a skilful pretender and dissembler. . . I mean that he should seem compassionate, trustworthy, humane, honest, and religious. . . but yet he should have his mind so trained that, when it is necessary not to have these virtues, he can change to the opposite and do it skilfully.<sup>2</sup>

The Machiavellian figure appears throughout the plays of Shakespeare. Hotspur says of Henry IV:

well we know the King  
Knows at what time to promise, when to pay.<sup>3</sup>

Gloucester says of himself:

And thus I clothe my naked villainy  
With odd old ends stol'n forth of holy writ,  
And seem a saint, when most I play the devil.<sup>4</sup>

Lady Macbeth advises Macbeth:

look like the innocent flower,  
But be the serpent under't.<sup>5</sup>

And York, even against his own impulse as a father warns

Bolingbroke:

Forget to pity him, lest thy pity prove  
A serpent that will sting thee to the heart.<sup>6</sup>

According to Wyndham Lewis in The Lion and the Fox the Elizabethans were "more terrified of Machiavelli than





of anybody."<sup>7</sup> The central conflict in Shakespeare's plays, he says, is the struggle between the spirit of mysticism, celtism, and chivalry, and the spirit of scientific truth and self-interest - the struggle between the lion and the fox. Mario Praz, however, argues that Machiavellianism was merely a label not only for what is loathsome in statecraft but in human nature.<sup>8</sup> He points out also that the popular notion of Machiavellian policy or politic was a travesty of Machiavelli's doctrines, implying that the Elizabethan concept of Machiavellianism was, in fact, a myth. The Machiavellian villain hero, he says, was one of the stock characters in Senecan drama and the Elizabethans simply grafted him onto an existing type. "What Machiavellianism is displayed in Shakespeare's historical dramas," he argues, "seems either to be already present in the historical sources (as in the case of Richard III) or to be derived from the broadest popular legend."<sup>9</sup>

But the response of Shakespeare and many of his contemporaries to Machiavelli was not as stereotyped or cliché as both Wyndham Lewis and Mario Praz would have it. Irving Kristol writes:

Dante put Brutus in hell, along with Satan and Judas; Machiavelli set the modern tone, extolled him as a defender of republic liberty; in Shakespeare we see the mixed feelings that attend the transition from the first perspective to the second - a transition which might be described, quite literally, as the "profanation" of politics: the removal of political authority, qua authority from the shadows of sanctity that had always enveloped it, and its subjugation to the test of la verità effettuale.<sup>10</sup>



Marvell's "Horatian Ode" epitomizes best the "mixed reaction" of the Elizabethans to Machiavelli. Marvell describes Cromwell's deposition of Charles I with:

Though Justice against Fate Complain,  
And plead the antient Right in vain:  
But these do hold or break  
As Men are strong or weak.<sup>11</sup>

And:

But thou the Wars and Fortunes Son  
March indefatigably on:  
And for the last effect  
Still keep thy Sword erect;  
Besides the force it has to fright  
The spirits of the shady Night,  
The same Arts that did gain  
A Pow'r must it maintain.<sup>12</sup>

Marvell's treatment of Cromwell is deliberately ambiguous. Cromwell's "art" is the art of the Machiavellian fox who believes that power can be achieved by force, not by right. Though "much to the man is due," he is a usurper who has gained power by the sword and must be prepared to die by the sword. And perhaps he has only gained ape-power, the right to ape the lion.

In Richard II Shakespeare treats the theme of usurpation with the same ambiguity of tone. There is a tension in the play between the necessity of deposing a bad king who has left his garden untended, and the inviolability of his authority. Like Marvell, Shakespeare does not "plead the antient Right in vain." Bolingbroke is a Machiavellian opportunist, but Shakespeare does not turn Bolingbroke into



a villain. Despite Richard's claims of divinity, Shakespeare does not turn him into a martyr.

Wilfred Watson's article on the most important word in Shakespeare shows how the "plucking" or theft of Richard's crown becomes, through the process of genetic word play, a metaphor for the process of evil - a metaphor which extends throughout all of Shakespeare's works.<sup>13</sup> Shakespeare saw Machiavelli as the grand thief who steals not from men but from Time. And he saw the deceptions involved in theft as the "objective correlative" of the paradox of experience.

(2) THE PROCESS OF MACHIAVELLIANISM, FOR SHAKESPEARE, IS AS PARADOXICAL AS THE PROCESS OF TIME. IN THE SONNETS HIS ATTITUDE TOWARD BOTH IS SIMULTANEOUSLY DEFIANT AND ACCOMMODATING.

If my dear love were but the child of state,  
 It might for Fortune's bastard be unfathered,  
 As subject to Time's love or to Time's hate,  
 Weeds among weeds, or flowers with flowers gathered.  
 No, it was builded far from accident;  
 It suffers not in smiling pomp, nor falls  
 Under the blow of thrall'd discontent,  
 Whereto th' inviting time our fashion calls.  
 It fears not policy, that heretic,  
 Which works on leases of short-numbered hours,  
 But all alone stands hugely politic,  
 That it nor grows with heat nor drowns with show'rs.  
 To this I witness call the fools of time,  
 Which die for goodness, who have lived for crime.  
 (124)

For Marvell Machiavelli is "the Wars and Fortunes Son;" for Shakespeare he is "Fortune's bastard." In the



master-mistress sonnets Shakespeare fuses the capriciousness of Fortune with the destructivity of Time in what loosely may be called the iconology of Machiavelli. Destructivity accorded simply to Time in the earlier sonnets merges, in the master-mistress sonnets, with accidents of state; and the machinations of "Time's love or Time's hate" merge with the whims of "thralléd discontent" and "smiling pomp."

The poet consistently presents himself as the victim of Fortune.

Let those who are in favour with their stars  
Of public honour and proud titles boast,  
Whilst I, whom fortune of such triumph bars,  
Unlooked for joy in that I honour most. (25)

When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,  
I all alone bewEEP my outcast state. . . (29)

As a decrepit father takes delight  
To see his active child do deeds of youth,  
So I, made lame by fortune's dearest spite,  
Take all my comfort of thy worth and truth. . . (37)

And in numerous sonnets the poet sets himself, and his love, outside of the fawning political world. In Sonnet 124, for example, the poet alone stands "hugely politic" with full cognizance of the world which judges him. He alone will not adopt Iago's mask, "I am not what I am."<sup>14</sup>

'Tis better to be vile than vile esteeméd,  
When not to be receives reproach of being;  
And the just pleasure lost, which is so deeméd  
Not by our feeling, but by other's seeing.  
For why should others' false adulterate eyes  
Give salutation to my sportive blood?  
Or on my frailties why are frailer spies,





Which in their wills count bad what I think good?  
 No, I am that I am, and they that level  
 At my abuses reckon up their own.  
 I may be straight though they themselves be bevel;  
 By their rank thoughts my deeds must not be shown;  
 Unless this general evil they maintain  
 All men are bad and in their badness reign. (121)

The belief that "all men are bad and in their  
 badness reign" echoes Machiavelli:

"In the world there are only the vulgar" -- "this is to be  
 asserted of men in general, that they are ungrateful,  
 fickle, false, cowards, covetous. . ."15

And it leads inevitably to Sonnet 66:

Tired with all these, for restful death I cry,  
 As, to behold desert a beggar born,  
 And needy nothing trimmed in jolity,  
 And purest faith unhappily forsworn,  
 And gilded honour shamefully misplaced,  
 And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted,  
 And right perfection wrongfully disgraced,  
 And strength by limping sway disabled,  
 And art made tongue-tied by authority,  
 And folly, doctor-like, controlling skill,  
 And simple truth miscalled simplicity,  
 And captive good attending captain ill.  
 Tired with all these, from these would I be gone,  
 Save that, to die, I leave my love alone. (66)

This kind of utterance ultimately is the basis of Wyndham  
 Lewis's thesis in The Lion and the Fox where he writes that  
 Shakespeare participated in his time, but he participated  
 on the side opposed to action.

Whereas Machiavelli was the hypnotized advocate of a  
 specific contemporary type of active life: and as Molière  
 was - in a different way - its adversary and critic:  
 Shakespeare was neither one nor the other. He was, if  
 anything, the adversary, of life itself (if to be the  
 critic is to be the adversary, and that poetry is a criticism  
 of life has been accepted as a good definition), and his  
 works a beautifully impersonal outpouring of fury, bitter  
 reflection, invective and complaint. . . .16



But Lewis does not do justice to Shakespeare's own sense of himself as dramatist, in the plays or in the Sonnets. Poetry is not just a criticism of life. It is exploration and therefore not static. Shakespeare explores the role both of the Machiavel and of the Anti-Machiavel. Just as he was able to see the creativity in Time, Shakespeare was able to see the creativity in Machiavellianism.

- (3) MACHIAVELLI EPITOMIZED THE RENAISSANCE SPIRIT OF PRAGMATISM AND SELF-INTEREST. IN THE SONNETS SHAKESPEARE VIEWS THE WORLD OF THE LOVER THROUGH THE LENS OF MACHIAVELLIAN PRAGMATISM.

The "love story" in the master-mistress sonnets is couched in a political narrative and subjected to the test of "la verita effettuale,"<sup>17</sup> as the divine right of kings is tested in the history plays. Sonnet 87 places the loved one not only in the context of Petrarchanism, but also in the context of the bourgeois world of possession and ownership, profit and loss.

Farewell! thou art too dear for my possessing,  
 And like enough thou know'st thy estimate.  
 The charter of thy worth gives thee releasing;  
 My bonds in thee are all determinate.  
 For how do I hold thee but by thy granting?  
 And for that riches where is my deserving?  
 The cause of this fair gift in me is wanting,  
 And so my patent back again is swerving.  
 Thyself thou gav'st, thine own worth then not knowing,



Or me, to whom thou gav'st it, else mistaking:  
 So thy great gift, upon misprision growing,  
 Comes home again, on better judgement making. (87)

In many of the master-mistress sonnets the language of commerce is interchangeable with the language of love. The calculations of the commercial world demand that input equal output, that emotional investments be repaid by material gain, and justified by material worth. In Sonnet 87 the person addressed has either underestimated his own "worth," or overestimated that of the poet, and his love is based on a "miscalculation." Sonnet 72 reinforces this argument.

O, lest the world should task you to recite  
 What merit lived in me, that you should love  
 After my death, dear love, forget me quite,  
 For you in me can nothing worthy prove;  
 Unless you would devise some virtuous lie,  
 To do more for me than mine own desert,  
 And hang more praise upon deceased I  
 Than niggard truth would willingly impart.  
 O, lest your true love may seem false in this!  
 That you for love speak well of me untrue,  
 My name be buried where my body is,  
 And live no more to shame nor me nor you! (72)

"Niggard truth" is King Lear's unimaginative truth:

Thy fifty yet doth double five and twenty,  
 And thou art twice her love.<sup>18</sup>

It is the kind of truth which necessitates the lie - "that you for love speak well of me untrue." In Sonnet 71 the poet is not unwilling to leave the "vile world" of pragmatic truth behind. But if the Sonnets are an implicit criticism of bourgeois Machiavellian pragmatism, they are equally a criticism of excessive idealism, and this is the theme of Sonnet 144.



- (4) THE THEME OF THE WOUND WHICH CURES, THE CORRUPTION WHICH BREEDS HEALTH, RUNS THROUGHOUT THE SONNETS ANTICIPATING THE MODERN EMPHASIS ON THE NECESSITY OF IMMERSION IN THE DESTRUCTIVE.

In Sonnet 118 Shakespeare explores the paradox of Sonnet 94 - that "lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds."

Like as, to make our appetites more keen,  
 With eager compounds we our palate urge;  
 As, to prevent our maladies unseen,  
 We sicken to shun sickness when we purge:  
 Even so, being full of your ne'er-cloying sweetness,  
 To bitter sauces did I frame my feeding;  
 And, sick of welfare, found a kind of meetness  
 To be diseased ere that there was true needing.  
 Thus policy in love, t'anticipate  
 The ills that were not, grew to faults assuréd,  
 And brought to medicine a healthful state,  
 Which, rank of goodness, would by ill be curéd:  
     But thence I learn, and find the lesson true,  
     Drugs poison him that so fell sick of you. (118)

Sweetness and goodness themselves fester and grow rank and foul. Good turns to an ill which paradoxically can only be cured by an ill - by self induced nausea. The poet of Sonnet 119 willingly drinks "limbecks foul as hell," and Sonnets 118 and 119 form a theoretical basis for Sonnet 144.

O benefit of ill! Now I find true  
 That better is by evil still made better;  
 And ruined love, when it is built anew,  
 Grows fairer than at first, more strong, far greater.  
     So I return rebuked to my content,  
     And gain by ills thrice more than I have spent. (119)

Two loves I have of comfort and despair,  
 Which like two spirits do suggest me still.  
 The better angel is a man right fair,  
 The worser spirit a woman coloured ill.







To win me soon to hell, my female evil  
 Tempteth my better angel from my side,  
 And would corrupt my saint to be a devil,  
 Wooing his purity with her foul pride.  
 And whether that my angel be turned fiend  
 Suspect I may, yet not directly tell;  
 But being both from me, both to each friend,  
 I guess one angel in another's hell.  
 Yet this shall I ne'er know, but live in doubt,  
 Till my bad angel fire my good one out. (144)

Leslie A. Fiedler sees the Sonnets as the narrative of the poet's "Two Loves" - not wife and mistress, but friend and mistress, boy and whore. Sonnet 144, he says, contains the "essential fable" of the sonnet sequence.

If all the sonnets except 144 were to disappear tomorrow, we would be left in possession. . . of the story Shakespeare tries to tell - the account of a poet who, seeking to divide his love in two, directing all that is ennobling in it toward one object, all that is vile toward another, ends by suspecting his two loved ones in each other's arms. . .<sup>19</sup>

Though he does go on to suggest the "moral significance" of the "story" as a "comment" on the ambiguity of "passion," he treats the sonnets in terms of content rather than form.

Content and form are indivisible, and content becomes form when it is used as a probe, as a tool for exploring a new environment, a new content. As Marshall McLuhan points out, "the content of any medium is always another medium."<sup>20</sup>

In Sonnet 144, as in Measure for Measure, Shakespeare uses the content of love to explore the results of the Cartesian split between body and mind - what Jacques Maritain called angelism. Man is often deceived by an ideal, a Houyhnhnm land. In Measure for Measure, Angelo is deceived



by the ideal of absolute law, and Isabella by absolute chastity. But Angelo's absolute law is unmerciful, and Isabella's chastity is cruel, their virtue is a vice, and both are forced to acknowledge the "bane" which is proper to man, as to rats, and is also his poison.<sup>21</sup>

In Sonnet 144, the corrupt, dark, sensuous Dionysian woman is required to cure man of his idolatry for the Apollonian figure. The Machiavellian dark spirit must fire out the angelist-Angelo spirit, the "man right fair" sometimes mistaken for the male beloved.

Hubler sees Sonnet 144 as an analogue to Boccaccio's tale of Rusticus and Alibech.<sup>22</sup> But fire has the connotation not only of lust and venereal disease, but also of purgation. If the reference to angels in hell in Sonnet 144 is a reference to sexuality, then sexuality is the road not only to damnation but also to salvation. The "content," the "story," of the poet who suspects his two loved ones in each other's arms is used to probe a desacralized Machiavellian world - the paradoxical interdependence of fair and foul, comfort and despair, purity and corruption, angel and devil, sexuality and spirituality, good and evil, body and soul.

As Crazy Jane replied to the Bishop in Yeats's poem:

'A woman can be proud and stiff  
When on love intent;  
But love has pitched his mansion in  
The place of excrement;  
For nothing can be sole, or whole  
That has not been rent.'<sup>23</sup>



Part of the experience of Sonnet 144 is the experience of finding that the body is the soul, that wholeness (or soul-ness) can only be achieved by a rent in the body that is a tear and also a renting or using, by a giving that is keeping. Or as Shakespeare expresses it in Sonnet 16, "To give yourself away keeps yourself still."

- (5) SHAKESPEARE SAW MACHIAVELLIANISM AS A FORCE WHICH NECESSITATES INVOLVEMENT IN LIFE, AND HE SAW LIFE AS MACHIAVELLIAN DRAMA. IN SONNETS 94 AND 144, SHAKESPEARE RECASTS THE SOVEREIGN-LIEGE, MASTER-MISTRESS THEME OF AMOUR COURTOIS INTO THE TERMS OF MACHIAVELLIAN "REAL POLITIC."

Sonnet 94 is perhaps the most paraphrased sonnet, and the most open to what Cleanth Brooks calls the "heresy of paraphrase." When we attempt to reduce a poem to a didactic statement, Brooks writes, "we bring the statement to be conveyed into an unreal competition with science or philosophy or theology."<sup>24</sup> It is especially easy to bring Sonnet 94 into competition with political philosophy. Shakespeare ironically adopts the mask of the Machiaeval.

They that have power to hurt and will do none,  
That do not do the things they most do show,  
Who, moving others, are themselves as stone,  
Unmovéd, cold and to temptation slow,  
They rightly do inherit heaven's graces  
And husband nature's riches from expense;  
They are the lords and owners of their faces,  
Others but stewards of their excellence.  
The summer's flow'r is to the summer sweet



Though to itself it only live and die,  
 But if that flow'r with base infection meet,  
 The basest weed outbraves his dignity:  
 For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds;  
 Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds. (94)

The sonnet seems a praise of Machiavellian "policy," but the virtues to be assumed are questionable. It may, in fact, be admirable to "have the power to hurt," and yet "do none," to have the power to move others and remain unmoved. But the rationale is a parody of the first nineteen sonnets. The strong shall "inherit heaven's graces" and be the guardians of "nature's riches." There is a bilocation of the simple matrix of the husbandman and the matrix of the politician in the sonnet.

The corruption of the best, the poem implies, often leads to the worst. But who are the best - the Machiavellian manipulators or the manipulated? Are they like Angelo, "unmoved, cold and to temptation slow,"<sup>25</sup> who scorn the antics of lovers only to be seduced and corrupted by innocence; are they like Othello who has no cognizance of the little Machiavellian manipulators who prey upon his ignorance?

Shakespeare realized that the self-sufficiency of the "summer's flower" ultimately is insufficient in dealing with the exigencies of the Machiavellian world, and that the private individual is always in some sense a public individual and therefore in the position of influencing and





being influenced. Paradoxically the role of the poet and the role of the lover in the Sonnets is that of Machiavellian manipulator.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE POET AS MACHIAVELLIAN LOVER

- (1) THE FIGURE OF THE MACHIAVELLIAN THIEF APPEARS THROUGHOUT THE SONNETS IN THE GUISE OF EITHER THE LOVER OR THE LOVED ONE. BUT THEIR MUTUAL THEFT DOES NOT SEPARATE THEM, BUT JOINS THEM TOGETHER.

Camus in The Plague maintains that it is impossible to act in a murderous society without being a murderer, and Shakespeare would say it is impossible to act in a "thief-ing" (Machiavellian) society without being a thief. In many of the master-mistress sonnets the lover is a thief, a parasite who derives sustenance from the beloved. In Sonnet 37 the poet engrafts himself to the "beloved's" virtue:

So I, made lame by fortune's dearest spite,  
Take all my comfort of thy worth and truth. . . (37)

In Sonnet 75 the "beloved" is the only source of life:

So are you to my thoughts as food to life,  
Or as sweet-seasoned showers are to the ground;  
And for the peace of you I hold such strife  
As 'twixt a miser and his wealth is found;  
Now proud as an enjoyer, and anon  
Doubting the filching age will steal his treasure;  
Now counting best to be with you alone,  
Then better'd that the world may see my pleasure:  
Sometime all full with feasting on your sight,  
And by and by clean starv'd for a look;  
Possessing or pursuing no delight,  
Save what is had or must from you be took. . . .(75)



And in Sonnet 62 the poet acquires his beauty:

'Tis thee, myself, that for myself I praise,  
Painting my age with beauty of thy days. (62)

Murray Krieger justifies the poet's painting his age with his friend's beauty in terms of the "mirror" of love which unites the two.

In Sonnets 67-68. . .Shakespeare condemns the "bastard signs of fair," that come from using another's beauty to enhance one's own. For these constitute imitative beauty, mere "roses of shadow." But this condemnation cannot extend to the poet in Sonnet 62, though he admittedly paints his age with the friend's beauty, since his use - springing from love's union - is not imitative. For the two are one.<sup>1</sup>

But, if the two are one, it is because they are involved in mutual theft and mutual deception. Theft, in fact, is the most consistent metaphor for love throughout the Sonnets. In Sonnet 40 the loved one becomes the thief.

I do forgive thy robb'ry, gentle thief, .  
Although thou steal thee all my poverty;  
And yet love knows, it is a greater grief  
To bear love's wrong than hate's known injury. (40)

The "gentle thief," like the "gentle cheater"<sup>2</sup> of the "dark lady sonnets" deceives with the willing acceptance of the poet. He is incriminated in their actions.

No more be grieved at that which thou hast done:  
Roses have thorns, and silver fountains mud;  
Clouds and eclipses stain both moon and sun,  
And loathsome canker lives in sweetest bud.  
All men make faults, and even I in this,  
Authórizing thy trespass with compare,  
Myself corrupting, salving thy amiss,  
Excusing thy sins more than thy sins are;  
For to thy sensual fault I bring in sense -  
Thy adverse party is thy advocate -  
And 'gainst myself a lawful plea commence.  
Such civil war is in my love and hate,



That I an accessáry needs must be  
To that sweet thief which sourly robs from me. (35)

The poet of Sonnet 35 is complicitous with the thief and corrupted by him. On one level the poet is accomplice if only because judging a sensual fault by sense sets mind against body in an attempt to rationalize the irrational. But "sense" also has the connotation of desire, and the poet only splits himself.

Shakespeare realized that in the complex web of innocence and guilt, crime and punishment, all are incriminated. Sonnet 35 could be used to gloss Measure for Measure. It asks Angelo's question:

What's this, what's this? Is this her fault or mine?  
The tempter, or the tempted, who sins most?<sup>3</sup>

And perhaps, it gives King Lear's answer:

Thou rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand!  
Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thy own back;  
Thou hotly lusts to use her in that kind  
For which thou whip'st her. The usurer hangs the cozener.  
Through tatter'd clothes great vices do appear;  
Robes and furr'd gowns hide all. Plate sins with gold,  
And the strong lance of justice, hurtless breaks;  
Arm it in rags, a pygmy's straw does pierce it.  
None does offend, none - I say none. . . .<sup>4</sup>

The poet's preoccupation with mutual theft and mutual deception in the Sonnets is a reflection of his preoccupation with the word "pluck" in the plays.

What makes the word pluck the most important word in Shakespeare is the fact that Shakespeare approximates all sins to forms of theft. In his calculus of evil, usurpation is the key concept, and plucking the fruit of the tree of knowledge is the key icon. . . .Unlike Dante, Shakespeare doesn't attempt to formulate his understanding of the nature of evil,





but he explores it endlessly by means of the pluck syntax. What is so terrible about evil, in Shakespeare's understanding of it, is the relentless way in which the thief attaches himself to the person stolen from, so that the victim cannot free himself, so to speak, from a forced marriage from which there is no divorce.<sup>5</sup>

- (2) IN THE SO CALLED "WILL SONNETS" SHAKESPEARE SEEMS TO BE TRIVIALIZING THE LAST GROUP OF SONNETS WITH A SOPHOMORISH WORD PLAY ON HIS OWN NAME, BUT THE "WILL SONNETS" ALSO REVEAL THE CENTRAL TRUTH OF THE SONNETS, THAT EVIL DOES NOT SEPARATE MEN, BUT JOINS THEM TOGETHER.

In Sonnets 135 and 136 Shakespeare exploits the connotations of his name much as Donne does in the "Hymne to God the Father." As if Shakespeare wished to provide the reader with guide lines he closes Sonnet 136 with:

Make but my name thy love and love that still,  
And then thou lovest me, for my name is Will. (136)

In On Love Ortega Y Gasset writes:

the role of the will, and in general, of the mind, is not creative but merely corrective. The will does not incite, but rather deters this or that involuntary impulse which animalistically rises from the subconscious.<sup>6</sup>

However, Shakespeare treats will not as a check on desire or passion, but as that which one desires.

Whoever hath her wish, thou has thy Will,  
And Will to boot, and Will in overplus;  
More than enough am I that vex thee still,  
To thy sweet will making addition thus.  
Wilt thou, whose will is large and spacious,  
Not once vouchsafe to hide my will in thine?  
Shall will in others seem right gracious,  
And in my will no fair acceptance shine?  
The sea, all water, yet receives rain still,  
And in abundance addeth to his store;



So thou, being rich in Will, add to thy Will  
 One will of mine, to make thy large Will more.  
 Let no unkind, no fair beseechers kill;  
 Think all but one, and me in that one Will. (135)

In the service of "will," the poet-lover is willing to reduce love to a measurable commodity. In Sonnet 135 he argues that the sea, though it is all water, still receives rain - adding to its store. And he is content to be one "will" in her large store of "will." In Sonnet 136 he is content to be one among a number - for "among a number one is reckoned none." His will is not negative or corrective, but nihilistic. He is "nothinged" by his love, and if she values him as nothing, then nothing is something.

For nothing hold me, so it please thee hold  
 That nothing me, a something sweet to thee. (136)

But her hold (over nothing) cannot be relinquished through legal means.

So, now I have confessed that he is thine  
 And I myself am mortgag'd to thy will,  
 Myself I'll forfeit, so that other mine  
 Thou wilt restore to be my comfort still.  
 But thou wilt not, nor he will not be free,  
 For thou art covetous and he is kind;  
 He learned but surety-like to write for me  
 Under that bond that him as fast doth bind.  
 The statute of thy beauty thou wilt take,  
 Thou usurer, that put'st forth all to use,  
 And sue a friend came debtor for my sake;  
 So him I lose through my unkind abuse.  
 Him have I lost; thou hast both him and me:  
 He pays the whole, and yet am I not free. (134)

The "friend" of the first nineteen sonnets was also accused of being a usurer - a "profitless usurer"<sup>7</sup> who misused himself through non-use. The "dark lady sonnets" are an ironic



echo of the first nineteen sonnets. The "dark lady" misuses through excessive use, and the poet himself is guilty of abuse - that is, of using others.

(3) FOR SHAKESPEARE THE PARADOX OF MACHIAVELLIAN POLICY LIES LESS IN ITS CALLOUS USE OF DECEPTION THAN IN ITS FASCINATION WITH THE TRUTH IT PERJURES.

Chaucer's Merchant tells a grotesque tale about a merchant-knight who refuses to believe that he sees his wife and his squire fornicating in a tree and accepts instead a lie.

And she answerde, "Sire, what eyleth yow?  
Have pacience and resoun in youre mynde!  
I have yow holpe on bothe youre eyen blynde.  
Up peril of my soule, I shal nat lyen  
As me was taught, to heele with youre eyen,  
Was no thyng bet, to make yow to see.  
Than struggle with a man upon a tree.  
God woot, I dide it in ful good entente."<sup>8</sup>

The Merchant himself is plagued by his wife "the worste that may be."<sup>9</sup> His tale is not a condemnation of the wife, but of the husband who exhibits not only a willingness but a need to be deceived. His tale is both self-mockery and subconscious parody. And the need to be deceived, as Patrick Cruttwell notes, is evident in the Shakespeare of the "dark lady sonnets."

The poet of the "dark lady sonnets" is not guilty of what Freud would call "over-valuation of the sexual object." He recognizes that his mistress is false, and that by loving



falsehood, he himself is false.

Thou blind fool, Love, what dost thou to mine eyes  
That they behold, and see not what they see?  
They know what beauty is, see where it lies,  
Yet what the best is take the worst to be. (137)

The poet's relationship with the "dark lady," that is with the world leads him ultimately to the position of perjury.

In loving thee thou know'st I am forsworn,  
But thou art twice forsworn, to me love swearing;  
In act thy bed-vow broke, and new faith torn  
In vowing new hate after new love bearing.  
But why of two oaths' breach do I accuse thee,  
When I break twenty? I am perjured most;  
For all my vows are oaths but to misuse thee,  
And all my honest faith in thee is lost:  
For I have sworn deep oaths of thy deep kindness,  
Oaths of thy love, thy truth, thy constancy;  
And to enlighten thee, gave eyes to blindness,  
Or made them swear against the thing they see;  
For I have sworn thee fair: more perjured I,  
To swear against the truth so foul a lie! (152)

The experience of the "dark lady sonnets" led the poet to question not only the senses as a way of knowing, but language as a means of conveying what one knows. Like January in the Merchant's Tale the poet chooses to ignore the evidence of his senses, to swear "beauty herself is black."<sup>10</sup> He has the "ocular proof"<sup>11</sup> as it were to "prove my love a whore."<sup>12</sup> She is the "wide world's commonplace,"<sup>13</sup> the "bay where all men ride."<sup>14</sup> But he maintains "better it were, / Though not to love, yet, love, to tell me so,"<sup>15</sup> and bids his mistress to "bear thine eyes straight, though thy proud heart go wide."<sup>16</sup> Sonnet 138 with its pun on lie conveys a tired acceptance of recognized deception.







When my love swears that she is made of truth,  
 I do believe her, though I know she lies,  
 That she might think me some untutored youth,  
 Unlearned in the world's false subtleties.  
 Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young,  
 Although she knows my days are past the best,  
 Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue:  
 On both sides thus is simple truth suppressed.  
 But wherefore says she not she is unjust?  
 And wherefore say not I that I am old?  
 O, love's best habit is in seeming trust,  
 And age in love loves not to have years told.  
 Therefore I lie with her and she with me,  
 And in our faults by lies we flattered be. (138)

The poet-lover consciously accepts his mask, his role in a Machiavellian relationship based on mutual deception. Cruttwell argues that "he asks to be cheated, but of course the mere asking implies that the cheat has already been detected."<sup>17</sup> The "mere asking" also implies that the cheat has already been forgiven. Hell, for Shakespeare, is not the place of divorce as it is for Dante, but the place of marriage. It is the place of mutual deception and mutual forgiveness. Deception here is the necessary subjection of truth to process. The deceptions to be forgiven move towards a paradoxical truth which can accommodate, as well as the exaltations of love, the erections of the body.

Love is too young to know what conscience is;  
 Yet who knows not conscience is born of love?  
 Then, gentle cheater, urge not my amiss,  
 Lest guilty of my faults thy sweet self prove:  
 For thou betraying me, I do betray  
 My nobler part to my gross body's treason;  
 My soul doth tell my body that he may  
 Triumph in love; flesh stays no farther reason,  
 But, rising at thy name, doth point out thee  
 As his triumphant prize. Proud of his pride,



He is contented thy poor drudge to be,  
To stand in thy affairs, fall by thy side.  
No want of conscience hold it that I call  
Her "love" for whose dear love I rise and fall.  
(151)



## CHAPTER V

### POETRY AS MACHIAVELLIAN CRAFT

- (1) CREATIVITY ALWAYS OCCURS IN TWO WORLDS AT ONCE. IN THE "MASTER-MISTRESS" SONNET THE WORLD OF THE PETRARCHAN LOVER AND THE WORLD OF THE THEATRE INTERSECT.

A woman's face with Nature's own hand painted  
Hast thou, the master-mistress of my passion;  
A woman's gentle heart, but not acquainted  
With shifting change, as is false women's fashion;  
An eye more bright than theirs, less false in rolling,  
Gilding the object whereupon it gazeth;  
A man in hue, all hues in his controlling,  
Which steals men's eyes and women's souls amazeth.  
And for a woman wert thou first created,  
Till Nature, as she wrought thee, fell a-doting,  
And by addition me of thee defeated  
By adding one thing to my purpose nothing.  
But since she pricked thee out for women's pleasure,  
Mine be thy love, and thy love's use their treasure.  
(20)

The "master-mistress" sonnet is usually treated as a "problem sonnet." It provides embarrassing evidence for those who want to make Shakespeare safe for the philistines, as Leslie Fiedler puts it.<sup>1</sup> And the poem does lend itself to numerous ambiguous readings. Is the woman's face that of a female, or is it a face painted on a boy as if by Nature's hand? Is the "master-mistress" the traditional sovereign female mistress, or a homosexual mistress?

While the sonnet seems to be a facetious inversion of courtly love poetry which was addressed always to a cold chaste goddess, the term "master-mistress" was derived from



the tradition. The troubadours addressed the lady of romance as midons meaning not my lady but my lord,<sup>2</sup> or as donz meaning literally the master-mistress.<sup>3</sup> Part of the exploration Shakespeare conducts in the master-mistress sonnets is an exploration of the nature of the devotion or passion demanded by the love poets.

Throughout the master-mistress sonnets, Shakespeare adopts the mask of the tongue-tied poet. In Sonnet 23, he is "an unperfect actor on the stage, / Who with his fear is put besides his part," and he bids the "beloved":

O, learn to read what silent love hath writ:  
To hear with eyes belongs to love's fine wit. (23)

And in Sonnet 35 the loved one again is counselled to understand the truth of silence.

Then others for the breath of words respect,  
Me for my dumb thoughts, speaking in effect. (35)

The injunction itself, of course, is paradoxical since it occurs in a poem which is not silent, but the poet's silence is always imputed to his inability to write in the conventional fashion. The poet has forgotten to say "the perfect ceremony of love's rite."<sup>4</sup> He cannot write cook-book poems.

So it is not with me as with that Muse  
Stirred by a painted beauty to his verse,  
Who heaven itself for ornament doth use  
And every fair with his fair doth rehearse,  
Making a couplement of proud compare  
With sun and moon, with earth and sea's rich gems,  
With April's first-born flowers, and all things rare  
That heaven's air in this huge rondure hems.  
O, let me, true in love, but truly write,  
And then believe me, my love is as fair





As any mother's child, though not so bright  
 As those gold candles fixed in heaven's air;  
 Let them say more that like of hearsay well;  
 I will not praise that purpose not to sell. (21)

The poetry is addressed to a pronoun only, a "thou" or a "you." The poet's passion blinds itself to everything but the passion. What is immortalized in the master-mistress sonnets is not a particular beauty, but the poet's response to a nebulous "other." His response is ordered through and by the paradox of art.

Oscar Wilde fastens upon "a man in hue all hues in his controlling" in Sonnet 20 as evidence that the master-mistress was Willie Hughes - boy actor for whom Shakespeare created Rosalind, Viola, and Juliet. In Sonnet 20 the master-mistress is described in brittle artificial terms, and the attributes of the "mistress" who defeated Nature as well as the poet are those of the boy actor who played the female roles. Part of the paradox of the theatre is the paradox of the playwright consciously creating roles for his male actors in which they must play the role of a woman playing the role of a man.

Wilde's essay, of course, is satiric. It lampoons Shakespearean critics who are willing to stake their reputations on a "theory," yet it is based on a seemingly sound hypothesis. The Sonnets he says, were not "isolated from the great aesthetic energies of Shakespeare's life, but were an essential part of his dramatic activity, and reveal



to us something of the secret of his method."<sup>5</sup>

Sonnet 20 juxtaposes the matrix of the Petrarchan lover and the matrix of the theatre. The result is heuristic. The poem becomes a probe of the various matrixes of the poet. Throughout the Sonnets we are confronted with the conflict between the lines drawn by the poet's pen and the lines of life drawn by Time's pencil, the balancing of the courtly love mystique and the Machiavellian ethic, and the interplay of the public and private man - the dramatist and the lover. These are the double plots on which the Sonnets turn.

(2) SHAKESPEARE'S FIRST LOVE UNDOUBTEDLY WAS THE THEATRE, AND THE "MASTER-MISTRESS OF MY PASSION" COULD METAPHORICALLY BE THE THEATRE, OR MORE GENERALLY HIS ART.

While the element of self-dramatization so prevalent in the poetry of Yeats is not evident in the Sonnets, Shakespeare like Yeats could say:

Players and painted stage took all my love,  
And not those things that they were emblems of.<sup>6</sup>

And Sonnets 22 and 24 argue that the "master-mistress" is the creation of the poet's imagination.

On first reading Sonnet 22 appears unpejorative - an intellectual argument for the union between two people - complete with the Petrarchan conceit of lovers living in each other's hearts. But the relationship between the poet



and "thou" is parasitical, and the argument for the preservation of youth and beauty is an argument for self preservation.

My glass shall not persuade me I am old,  
 So long as youth and thou are of one date;  
 But when in thee time's furrows I behold,  
 Then look I death my days should expiate.  
 For all that beauty that doth cover thee  
 Is but the seemly raiment of my heart,  
 Which in thy breast doth live, as thine in me.  
 How can I then be elder than thou art?  
 O, therefore, love, be of thyself so wary,  
 As I, not for myself, but for thee, will;  
 Bearing thy heart, which I will keep so chary  
 As tender nurse her babe from faring ill.  
 Presume not on thy heart when mine is slain;  
 Thou gav'st me thine, not to give back again. (22)

In a poem to Cynthia, the Roman poet Propertius says something close to Sonnet 22. Shakespeare declares that his mistress's beauty is an illusion which he himself has created. According to Leishman, Propertius is the only ancient poet to do this. Leishman translates Propertius' poem as:

False is that confidence of yours in your beauty, woman long since made too proud of my admiring eyes. It was my love, Cynthia, that bestowed such praises on you. I am ashamed of the eminence you have acquired through my verses. Often did I praise the mingling in you of varied beauty, so that my love came to believe you to be that which you were not, and time and again your complexion was compared to rosy Dawn, although the brightness of your face has been acquired by art.<sup>7</sup>

In Sonnet 22 what Shakespeare declares is this: not only is your beauty my own creation, but you will be what I want you to be. Or as R.P. Blackmur expresses it, "you are nothing but what I created."<sup>8</sup>



Sonnet 24 emphasizes the fact that the "poet-painter" does not paint with "Nature's own hand." He transforms and shapes Nature, and paradoxically this transformation is the only way he can arrive at a true "image."

For through the painter must you see his skill  
To find where your true image pictured lies. . . .

For the poet of the Sonnets, the only way art can "imitate" nature or process is by shaping and transmuting it.

Sonnet 127 explores the shaping power of art.

In the old age black was not counted fair,  
Or if it were, it bore not beauty's name;  
But now is black beauty's successive heir,  
And beauty slandered with a bastard shame:  
For since each hand hath put on Nature's power,  
Fairing the foul with Art's false borrowed face,  
Sweet beauty hath no name, no holy bower,  
But is profaned, if not lives in disgrace.  
Therefore my mistress' brows are raven black,  
Her eyes so suited, and they mourners seem  
At such who, not born fair, no beauty lack,  
Sland'ring creation with a false esteem.  
Yet so they mourn, becoming of their woe,  
That every tongue says beauty should look so. (127)

And Sonnet 127 is anticipated in the master-mistress sonnets by Sonnet 68:

Thus is his cheek the map of days outworn,  
When beauty lived and died as flowers do now,  
Before these bastard signs of fair were born,  
Or durst inhabit on a living brow;  
Before the golden tresses of the dead,  
The right of sepulchres, were shorn away  
To live a second life on second head;  
Ere beauty's dead fleece made another gay.  
In him those holy antique hours are seen,  
Without all ornament, itself and true,  
Making no summer of another's green,  
Robbing no old to dress his beauty new;  
And him as for a map doth Nature store,  
To show false Art what beauty was of yore. (68)





Sonnet 127 argues that through art beauty has bred blackness (an ironic echo of Sonnet 1), and "black is beauty's successive heir." Art, that is, has falsified the Natural world where "beauty lived and died as flowers do now." Even the foul have put on "art's false borrowed face," the face of the courtly lover, and also the face of the Machiavellian craftsman.

The Sonnets argue that falsification paradoxically is necessary in order for art to be true.

- (3) IF THE MASTER-MISTRESS OF MY PASSION IS A METAPHOR FOR THE THEATRE, THE THEATRE ITSELF IS A METAPHOR FOR MACHIAVELLIAN CRAFT.

In his treatment of deception and lies in the Sonnets Shakespeare shows an ironic awareness of the original meaning of deception - a meaning which includes not only theft, but being able. Eric Partridge's study of the etymology of words treats deception with the words capable and capability. Capable, he says, is derived from capere - to take in one's hands, to contain, to take. And deception is a combining verb form of capere producing dēcipere - to take by causing game to fall into a trap, hence to capture by ruse, hence to betray.<sup>9</sup> The word is a compound of theft and being able - the basic components of Machiavellian craft and also the craft of the dramatist.

Shakespeare's leading characters in the comedies,



histories and tragedies are all characters who reveal either consciousness of being aware, or awareness of being unaware, of their own capabilities. What Lionel Abel says of the characters in a Pirandello play might be said of the self-conscious Shakespearean characters - the characters who reveal the consciousness of being conscious - "they are most real when dressed up in their peculiar roles."<sup>10</sup> They are, that is, most real when they are being false.

Richard III's mask of villainy is the "real" Richard:

I am determined to prove a villain  
And hate the idle pleasures of these days.<sup>11</sup>

In King Lear Gloucester reduces his son to a nothing, and Edgar can only be a true son when he consciously assumes the role of nothing - "Edgar I nothing am."<sup>12</sup> And Kent can only be the king's servant by consciously assuming the role of the servant.

They are actors playing actors in a play about a play. The artist figures in the plays are artists playing artists. The Duke in Measure for Measure, and the Duke in The Tempest, Iago, Richard III, Hamlet, Lady Macbeth, and Falstaff all manipulate their human environment with the crassness of a Machiavel, and the skill of a puppet-master, or of a poet.

Lionel Abel attributes the inability of Western dramatists, including Shakespeare, to write truly successful tragedy to the self-consciousness both of the artist and of



his protagonists.<sup>13</sup> What this type of self-consciousness produces, he says, is "metatheatre," theatre about theatre. He treats Hamlet as the most obvious example of "metatheatre," in Shakespeare, and points out that Prince Hamlet with his famous "mouse-trap plot" is not the only manipulator in the play. Hamlet, Claudius, the Ghost and Polonius are all artist-playwright figures each attempting to write their own drama.

All the characters in the play can be distinguished as follows: some are fundamentally dramatists or would be dramatists, the others are fundamentally actors.<sup>14</sup>

The characters who play the dual role of actor and dramatist, he says, all have "the consciousness of a dramatist as well as that of a character."<sup>15</sup>

In so many Shakespearean plays, the audience watches an artist, or numerous artists, at work molding their human environment to suit their own vision of "reality." But the audience too, is manipulated by the artist, though in a more subtle fashion. Wyndham Lewis sees the artist as a manipulator who works in human plastic giving men new eyes with which to see and accomodate the new age. Marshall McLuhan says the artist has moved from the ivory tower to the control tower of society. He "builds models or Noah's arks for facing the change which is at hand."<sup>16</sup> Their claims for the shaping power of art are not as far reaching as Shelley's belief that the poet is the unacknowledged legislator



of the world, but both are aware that the poet does not "communicate," or "imitate." Both are aware that art is a way of perceiving and a way of knowing. The poet manipulates his audience by changing their perceptions, their way of knowing through the paradox of art.

(4) FOR SHAKESPEARE THE POETIC PROCESS IS THE DRAMATIC PROCESS. IF THE PLAYS ARE METATHEATRE, THE SONNETS ARE METAPARADOX.

The philosopher's "truth" is inevitably subject to the verifiability of his pre-suppositions, but as Sir Philip Sidney said of the poet, he nothing affirms, and therefore never lies.<sup>17</sup> While there is always the question of whether or not any concept can be true outside of the boundaries of its own terms, or the artist's vision outside of the boundaries imposed by the art form, the truth with which the poet deals usually turns out to be irreducible paradox.

In "Elegie XVI," for example, Donne advises his mistress against travelling through Europe with him disguised as his page because her falsity will be detected.

Men of France, changeable Camelions,  
Spittles of disease, shops of fashions,  
Loves fuellers, and the rightest company  
Of Players, which upon the worlds stage be,  
Will quickly know thee, and no lesse, alas!  
Th' indifferent Italian, as we passe  
His warme land, well content to thinke thee Page. . . .<sup>18</sup>

He wants her to "be my true Mistris still, not my faign'd Page,"<sup>19</sup> but paradoxically the only way she can be his "true





mistris" is by pretending she does not love him.

When I am gone, dreame me some happinesse,  
Nor let thy lookes our long hid love confesse,  
Nor praise, nor dispraise me, nor blesse nor curse  
Openly loves force. . . .<sup>20</sup>

Like Shakespeare's "dark lady," and art itself, she must be false in order to be true.

The thesis of Bacon's essay "Of Truth" is that lies are in favour due to a "natural though corrupt love of the lie itself." And though Bacon claims that "no pleasure is comparable to the standing upon the vantage ground of Truth," the only "truth" which the essay contains is expressed through paradox. "What is Truth?" said jesting Pilate; and would not stay for an answer."<sup>21</sup>

Paradox reveals the truth of the lie and the reality of illusion. The work of art ultimately is paradoxical. It is a falsehood, a lie, a mask or form, through which both poet and reader can perceive truth. For Shakespeare, like Bacon, paradox is meta-truth.



## FOOTNOTES

All passages from Shakespeare's Sonnets are quoted from The London Shakespeare, edited by John Munro. Roman numerals have been changed to Arabic numerals. All passages from Shakespeare's plays are quoted from The Complete Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare, edited by W.A. Neilson and C.J. Hill.

### Chapter I

<sup>1</sup>Colie, Paradoxia Epidemica, 508.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>3</sup>Austin, Rice University Studies, Volume 52, 5.

<sup>4</sup>Colie, Paradoxia Epidemica, 518-519.

<sup>5</sup>Brooks, The Well Wrought Urn, 103.

<sup>6</sup>Traversi, An Approach to Shakespeare, 59-60.

<sup>7</sup>Black, Models and Metaphors, 242.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 229.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 228.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 239.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 236-237.

<sup>12</sup>Koestler, The Act of Creation, 35-36.

<sup>13</sup>Sontag, Against Interpretation, 270.

<sup>14</sup>Empson, Some Versions of Pastoral, 39.

<sup>15</sup>King Lear, III, iv, 112.



- <sup>16</sup>Colie, Paradoxia Epidemica, 516-517.
- <sup>17</sup>Wordsworth, "Scorn not the Sonnet," ll. 1-3.
- <sup>18</sup>See Stirling, PMLA, LXXV, 340-349.
- <sup>19</sup>Hamlet, V, ii, 360.
- <sup>20</sup>Wimsatt, The Verbal Icon, 3.
- <sup>21</sup>Colie, Paradoxia Epidemica, 361.
- <sup>22</sup>Arnheim, Film as Art, 3.
- <sup>23</sup>King Lear, IV, vi, 186-187.
- <sup>24</sup>Henry V, Prologue, ll-14.
- <sup>25</sup>Sonnet 94.
- <sup>26</sup>Othello, I, i, 65.

## Chapter II

- <sup>1</sup>Sonnet 9.
- <sup>2</sup>Sonnet 3.
- <sup>3</sup>Sonnet 11.
- <sup>4</sup>Hopkins, "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo," ll. 1-2.
- <sup>5</sup>McLuhan, Understanding Media, 51.
- <sup>6</sup>Sonnet 1.
- <sup>7</sup>Measure for Measure, I, iv, 40-44.
- <sup>8</sup>Krieger, A Window to Criticism, 97-98.



<sup>9</sup>Panofsky, Studies in Iconology, 71-73.

<sup>10</sup>Haydn, The Counter-Renaissance, 362.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 365.

<sup>12</sup>Leishman, Themes and Variations, 100-101.

<sup>13</sup>Sonnet 12.

<sup>14</sup>Sonnet 16.

<sup>15</sup>Sonnet 62.

<sup>16</sup>Donne, "The Legacie," l. 4.

<sup>17</sup>Blackmur, Riddle, 150.

<sup>18</sup>Henry V, III, Prologue, 35.

<sup>19</sup>Sonnet 116.

<sup>20</sup>Sonnet 25.

### Chapter III

<sup>1</sup>Praz, Machiavelli and the Elizabethans, 7.

<sup>2</sup>Machiavelli, The Prince, 149.

<sup>3</sup>Henry IV, IV, iv, 52-53.

<sup>4</sup>Richard III, I, iii, 336-338.

<sup>5</sup>Macbeth, I, v, 66-67.

<sup>6</sup>Richard II, V, iii, 57-58.

<sup>7</sup>Lewis, The Lion and the Fox, 64.





<sup>8</sup>Praz, Machiavelli and the Elizabethans, 6.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 30.

<sup>10</sup>Kristol, Encounter, XV, 52.

<sup>11</sup>Marvell, "Horatian Ode," ll. 37-40.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., ll. 113-120.

<sup>13</sup>See Watson, Explorations, No. 25, 77-96.

<sup>14</sup>Richard II, IV, i, 201-210.

<sup>15</sup>Quoted in The Lion and the Fox, 106.

<sup>16</sup>Lewis, The Lion and the Fox, 160.

<sup>17</sup>Kristol, Encounter, XV, 52.

<sup>18</sup>King Lear, II, iv, 262-263.

<sup>19</sup>Fiedler, Riddle, 60-61.

<sup>20</sup>McLuhan, Understanding Media, 23.

<sup>21</sup>Measure for Measure, I, iii, 130-133.

<sup>22</sup>Hubler, Shakespeare's Songs and Poems, 154.

<sup>23</sup>Yeats, "Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop," ll. 13-18.

<sup>24</sup>Brooks, The Well Wrought Urn, 201.

<sup>25</sup>Sonnet 94.

#### Chapter IV

<sup>1</sup>Krieger, A Window to Criticism, 164.



<sup>2</sup>Sonnet 151.

<sup>3</sup>Measure for Measure, II, ii, 163-164.

<sup>4</sup>King Lear, IV, vi, 164-172.

<sup>5</sup>Watson, Explorations, No. 25, 95.

<sup>6</sup>Ortega Y Gasset, On Love, 84.

<sup>7</sup>Sonnet 4.

<sup>8</sup>Chaucer, "The Merchant's Tale," ll. 2368-2375.

<sup>9</sup>Chaucer, "The Merchant's Prologue," l. 1218.

<sup>10</sup>Sonnet 132.

<sup>11</sup>Othello, III, iii, 360.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., III, iii, 359.

<sup>13</sup>Sonnet 137.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Sonnet 140.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Cruttwell, The Shakespearean Moment, 13.

## Chapter V

<sup>1</sup>Fiedler, Riddle, 59.

<sup>2</sup>Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, 15.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 19.



<sup>4</sup>Sonnet 23.

<sup>5</sup>Wilde, Riddle, 140.

<sup>6</sup>Yeats, "The Circus Animals' Desertion," ll. 31-32.

<sup>7</sup>Leishman, Themes and Variations, 43.

<sup>8</sup>Blackmur, Riddle, 140.

<sup>9</sup>Partridge, Origins, 76-77

<sup>10</sup>Abel, Metatheatre, 111.

<sup>11</sup>Richard III, I, i, 30-32.

<sup>12</sup>King Lear, III, iii, 21.

<sup>13</sup>Abel, Metatheatre, 77.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 49-50.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 49.

<sup>16</sup>McLuhan, Understanding Media, 70.

<sup>17</sup>Sidney, An Apology for Poetry, 124.

<sup>18</sup>Donne, "Elegie XVI," ll. 33-39.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., l. 13.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 47-49.

<sup>21</sup>Bacon, The Philosophical Works of Francis Bacon, 736.



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